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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 STATE 100197

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SUBJECT: SCA ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLAKE'S SEPTEMBER 24,
2009 MEETING WITH SRI LANKAN DEFENSE SECRETARY GOTABHAYA
RAJAPAKSA

Classified By: SCA: AS ROBLAKE

11. (SBU) Participants:

U.S.

SCA A/S Blake
SCA Special Assistant Matthew Lowe
Anthony Renzulli (SCA Notetaker)

Sri Lanka

Defense Secretary Rajapaksa
Ambassador to the United States Jaliya Wickramasuriya

12. (C) SUMMARY. In a September 24 meeting with Defense Secretary Gotobhaya Rajapaksa on the margins of the UN General Assembly, SCA A/S Robert Blake stressed the urgent importance of resettling as many internally displaced persons (IDPs) as possible and providing them freedom of movement, and the urgency of beginning a political reconciliation process with the Tamil community, if we are to make progress in strengthening U.S.-Sri Lanka relations. Key to reconciliation is identifying an accountability process to help address past human rights abuses and potential violations of international law that may have transpired during the final stages of the military conflict with the Tamil Tigers (LTTE), Blake pressed.

13. (C) Rajapaksa underlined his personal commitment to strengthening relations with the U.S. He said the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) is committed to resettling as many IDPs to their villages as quickly as possible, arguing that it is in the government's political and security interests to do so, but the process is slowed by a lack of funding and demining equipment, inadequate infrastructure and housing in conflict-affected areas, and the continued presence of LTTE in the IDP camps. He maintained that people can leave the camps and regretted the perception that they are detained. He argued that people in the camps have nowhere else to go and have chosen to stay. He pointed to the Eastern Province as an example of a successful resettlement effort which, he stressed, took up to nine months. It has only been three

months since the end of war, he emphasized. He sought to assure Blake of President Rajapaksa's commitment to political reconciliation, but argued that the President needed to be cautious of political opponents who will seek to portray him as selling out the nation after the Army's sacrifice and hard-won victory. Accountability "commissions" at this stage, he told Blake, would tear the country apart, rather than promote reconciliation. END SUMMARY.

IDP RETURNS

¶4. (C) Blake underscored the importance of resettling as many IDPs as quickly as possible, noting that a number of GSL-announced deadlines had lapsed. Rajapaksa said that he and the President believe that the sooner IDPs are resettled, the better. That's why the government's plans have been so ambitious. The camps are difficult to control security-wise -- LTTE combatants easily hide in them -- and breed political resentment, he contended. The President wants these people's political support. Screening for former LTTE could more easily take place in villages. The GSL knows who most of the hard-core LTTE are and could easily monitor them.

¶5. (C) The biggest problem, according to Rajapaksa, is financial. For example, Justice Minister Moragoda, who is in

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charge of rehabilitation of former LTTE combatants, is keen to press ahead on this effort. The GSL has provided staff and developed with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) a strategy for rehabilitation that emphasizes livelihood training, but still lacks the resources to build the centers and the housing required. (NOTE: State/USAID has proposed to DOD using a significant portion of the approximately \$10 million in DOD-provided 1207 funding for post-conflict stabilization in northern Sri Lanka (about \$10 million) on IOM-implemented projects that support the rehabilitation of former LTTE and pro-government paramilitary combatants and former child soldiers, building on similar work in the East. END NOTE.)

¶6. (C) Blake recalled that, as Ambassador, he told GSL officials that the U.S. would have difficulty funding the long-term presence of IDPs in camps; it would be perceived as supporting incarceration. Rajapaksa stressed that it had been only three months; in the East, the first batch of IDP returns did not take place for nine months. Blake pointed to the barbed wire around the camp as evidence that camp residents could not leave. Rajapaksa disputed that assessment. The barbed wire, he said, could be removed. The camps are not closed. Eight thousand camp residents have disappeared and people are free to leave, for example, to go to the hospital or shopping in Vavuniya city (Department would appreciate Embassy Colombo's assessment of whether this is true). The reality, he argued, is that these people have no place to go. The government offered the elderly the opportunity to leave, but they chose to remain. Likewise, 45,000 IDPs from Jaffna Peninsula have chosen to remain in the camps because there is no housing on Jaffna. Basic infrastructure and housing in conflict-affected areas in the North have been completely destroyed, Rajapaksa maintained, though electricity provision is underway and irrigation reconstruction is commencing. Family and friends are not, in most cases, a viable option; it is a significant financial burden for a poor family to take on even one person.

DE-MINING

¶7. (C) Rajapaksa surmised that if the GSL was to allow IDPs to go wherever they wanted, there would be significant

casualties from landmines. Blake said the U.S. could consider doing more to assist in the demining area, if freedom of movement is assured. Rajapaksa said that many promises from the international community of demining assistance have not been fulfilled. The military alone successfully de-mined seventy percent of the East. He asked that the U.S. provide demining equipment to the government directly and demand accountability. He suggested the Embassy could create a mechanism to ensure such accountability. He questioned the utility of the demining assistance the U.S. has provided to NGOs that were not, he said, working productively. A/S Blake reiterated that assurances on freedom of movement would help us make the case for additional assistance, and suggested removing the barbed wire and allowing the press to witness it and free movement of camp residents.

POLITICAL RECONCILIATION

18. (C) Blake questioned why President Rajapaksa announced his intent to delay steps on devolution until after presidential and parliamentary elections in spring 2010, when opposition political parties are so weak. Progress on this area would net Tamil votes that could more than offset any loss of support from nationalists, whereas continued delay in announcing political reconciliation efforts would further diminish the President's Tamil support. Rajapaksa reiterated

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that the President wants Tamil votes and said his party expects to win them in the Eastern Province. The President knew he would lose in Vavuniya municipality to the opposition Tamil National Alliance, so soon after the fighting, but was okay with that. The President's concern is that the nationalist People's Liberation Front (JVP) has tried to destabilize the government by suggesting that the President aims to sacrifice the hard-won victory of the Army. He attributed rumors about Chief of Defense Staff Fonseka's presidential candidacy to these machinations.

19. (C) Rajapaksa said the President was committed to devolution, but that the 13th Amendment would require adjustment before it could be implemented. Right now, police authority would devolve to the Chief Minister; and the only Tamil Chief Minister would be in the Northern Province. Chief Ministers have no national or international obligations; the GSL wants more Tamil-speaking representation among the police.

110. (C) What is most important, said Blake, is that everyone should feel that they are equal as Sri Lankans and share the same rights. That is not the case right now for Tamils. Rajapaksa blamed the LTTE, and pointed again to the East where there is "full freedom." He urged A/S Blake to have confidence in the GSL. He regretted that there was too much "speculation, talking and shouting." We know the situation is not perfect, he said. "The conflict was long and hard," and society has benefitted greatly from the LTTE's defeat. Rajapaksa pleaded that he had not received the credit he deserved for disarming the LTTE cadres and the paramilitaries. He has outlawed ransom payments and threatened to prosecute anyone who pays bribes or ransom. The government wants people, even former hardcore LTTE, to live a normal life. Blake suggested that the GSL engage the Tamil diaspora community, which could provide financial resources for reconstruction in the north, if the GSL can convince them of its good intentions. He suggested that the GSL consider starting a non-profit organization that could receive contributions from overseas for reconstruction and rehabilitation. Rajapaksa told Blake that the GSL has started reaching out to Tamils in Colombo; Ambassador Wickramasuriya said the Embassy has begun to do so in the

U.S. as well. "People who want to settle problems are not aggressive," Rajapaksa said.

ACCOUNTABILITY

¶11. (C) Blake said that the report requested by Congress on potential violations of international humanitarian law and crimes against humanity committed during the final stages of the conflict is expected to be released in mid to late October. It is secondary source reporting and we will make sure it is identified as such, Blake said. However, part of political reconciliation is identifying an accountability process to deal with past human rights abuses and look at what occurred in the final stages of the war. Rajapaksa responded that commissions like these are going to tear the people apart, suggesting that LTTE supporters would exploit the process. He said the government did a lot to control wide-scale abuses, such as those, he implied, that had occurred in the past. Mass rape and village massacres did not occur during the GSL's campaign, and he pointed again to the positive overall experience in the Eastern Province. In that case, said Blake, the GSL had nothing to fear from a national dialogue and reconciliation. Rajapaksa said the government is committed to winning hearts and minds, but it has only been three months since the end of fighting.

BUILDING U.S.-SRI LANKA RELATIONS

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¶12. (C) Rajapaksa emphasized to Blake his personal commitment to developing relations with the United States, pointing to the strong personal connections between the United States and his country's leadership. (Note: Rajapaksa himself is a U.S. citizen. End Note.) Blake said the U.S. shares this desire, but we need to see progress on the issues discussed. Evidence of freedom of movement, for example, would go a long way toward that end.
CLINTON